

# Red Cross Report of German Prison Camps

Australian Red Cross Society

1940-1941



LIFE IN PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS IN GERMANY IS DESCRIBED BY TWO DELEGATES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS IN REPORTS WHICH HAVE REACHED THE AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY.

— oOo —

THE REPORTS GIVE THE CLEAREST PICTURE OF GERMAN PRISON CAMPS YET PRESENTED TO AUSTRALIA. THEY WERE MADE TO THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AFTER VISITS TO 20 CAMPS BY DR. ROLAND MARTI AND DR. PIERRE DESCOEUDRES, DELEGATES APPOINTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE.

DRS. MARTI AND DESCOEUDRES CRISSCROSSED GERMANY IN THREE JOURNEYS, DRIVEN BY A CHAUFFEUR OF THE GERMAN RED CROSS, WITH PETROL SUPPLIED BY THE ARMY.

THEY WERE FREE TO ENTER ANY CAMP AND TO SPEAK TO PRISONERS WITHOUT WITNESSES. THE RIGHT TO DO THIS IS ONE OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE PRISONER-OF-WAR CODE.

THE DELEGATES MAKE SOME CRITICISMS, BUT, GENERALLY, SPEAK WELL OF THE WAY GERMANY IS TREATING HER PRISONERS.

THE MAIN POINTS IN THE REPORTS ARE:-

OFFIZIERSLAGER (OFLAG) 111 B. (permanent camp for officers). This camp is made up of 32 house-barracks spread over a forest of pines, bordering a lake. The houses had been used by the German army in peace-time. Lanes and paths

crossed the forest and one did not get the impression of it being a camp for prisoners of war. The prisoners (Belgian) number more than 1,500 officers and about 350 non-commissioned officers.

N.C.O's<sup>1</sup> are billeted in two long huts in which there are four rows of beds in three tiers, covered with straw. Each man has one blanket and stoves are provided.

Officers live in two-storied houses with every comfort. In each room is a basin with cold water, and in every building a room with cold shower-baths. There are two houses for officers of the highest rank, but each of these officers has his own room. Some generals also have an adjoining room with a sofa and desk. Three meals a day are served - breakfast (more than half a pound of bread and as much coffee as desired), dinner (potato and barley soup and beef), tea (bread, butter, cheese and coffee). These rations are similar to those of the civil population in Germany. Our delegates found the soup excellent.

All the prisoners were wearing their uniforms or at least what they had on when they arrived at the camp, but several had no overcoats. Generally, the men need a change of clothing. There is a canteen, but because of the newness of the camp it is not well supplied. The prisoners' health appears to be good. Hot as well as cold showers are available. A sports ground, in the real sense of the word, has not yet been made, but there is enough room for exercises and walks. The infirmary is supervised by 20 doctors, all officers. At the time of our delegates' visit there were six officers and eight non-commissioned officers in the infirmary, most of them suffering from entero-colitis (a form of Dysentery) and one suspected case of diphtheria. Twenty priests officiate freely for the Roman Catholics, who are in the majority. Radio loud speakers will soon be installed. Language classes will soon be started. There is no library yet. Officers receive their pay regularly. Our delegates declared that the treatment of the prisoners was good from every point of view. Discipline is perfect, and the prisoners appear satisfied.

STAMMLAGER (STALAG) 21 B.Z. (permanent camp for N.C.O's and privates). This camp had the appearance of a immense courtyard swarming with prisoners, surrounded on four sides by buildings formerly used as a Roman Catholic school. Outside the camp, large grounds had been arranged for games. Prisoners sleep in beds built up in three tiers. Straw has been replaced by palliasses<sup>2</sup>, and every man has a blanket. Prisoners have three meals a day - breakfast (coffee), dinner (sauerkraut, potatoes, a little meat, all mixed up together), tea (coffee, a little meat in paste and bread). When our delegates visited this camp, the new potatoes had not arrived and the old potatoes seemed no longer good. Our delegates heard many complaints about them. Many prisoners wanted a change of clothing badly. But, according to the camp authorities, the men themselves were responsible, as they had sold linen given to them on arrival to get tobacco. There is a canteen where tobacco and indispensable articles may

---

<sup>1</sup>Non-commissioned Officers.

<sup>2</sup>straw mattresses

be bought. The prisoners, unfortunately, cannot make use of it as they have little money.

There were only seven patients in the infirmary, which is supervised by a Polish doctor. Prisoners have a few books as well as the camp paper, called *The Camp*, and a few packs of cards. They made some sets of draughts<sup>3</sup>. The Methodist prisoners have organised services on Wednesdays and Sundays. The 99 prisoners who work in parties under the command of an officer and the 50 who are building inside of the camp, get 10 pfennig (little more than a penny) and hour. The others get nothing. Delegates who visited the camp before said they found a marked improvement. They asked the commandant about clothes. He assured them that, as soon as the weather began to grow cold, he would get fresh underclothes for the men, but he said he was afraid that, once more, they would be exchanged for tobacco.

STALAG XX1. B.A. – Of the 3,700 Englishmen who arrived at the end of June, 1940, 2,700 are in the camp. The others are in working parties in the neighboring villages. The men are in either a house formerly a primary school, or in three new huts. The many buildings which our delegates visited held large quantities of provisions - bread, fat, meat, butter and barley. The prisoners declare themselves satisfied with the food. Delegates found the soup excellent and substantial. Large buildings also contain considerable quantities of clothing, underclothing and blankets in a perfect state of cleanliness. These clothes are almost exclusively Polish made. To check thieving among prisoners, camp police service has been formed of N.C.O's. The canteen is well supplied with razors, cigarettes and bread. The Methodists in camp have organised divine service. The delegates formed an excellent impression of the whole of this camp.

STALAG XXA. – This huge camp is made up of forts built in 1880. There are 17,000 men there, of whom 6,400 are in the working parties which extend very far, even to the north-east of Germany. All are English, except about 900 White Russians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians, 250 Poles, about 50 colored men, and a few French and Belgians. The food is sufficient and the rations normal. The men have no complaints on this point. Thirty German women were busy washing the prisoners' clothes. The canteen is well equipped. A patent razor with blades can be bought for 50 pfennig (about 6d.) The men have gymnastics for an hour every morning. For the whole camp there are only 17 doctors (English, French, Belgian and Polish.)

The food given to the patients is excellent. They get many extra things such as white bread, eggs, pure milk, butter or sausages. A German doctor lives in the camp to supervise medical work. Two German dentists come to the camp three times a week. Each religious denomination arranges its own services. Choral societies have been formed. Only the prisoners who work are paid, but each man has a chance to work.

On the day the delegates arrived, 800 parcels were received from British Red

---

<sup>3</sup>Checkers game

Cross, through Geneva, and greeted with joy and gratitude. The warm woollen articles were taken out and will not be given to the prisoners until the beginning of winter, to prevent them being exchanged for tobacco.

STALAG. 1.B. – This camp, close to a small town is very large and forms a huge rectangle surrounded by the usual barbed wire and surmounted by about ten watch-towers. There are about 22,000 men in this camp. This number is changeable, as about 2,000 arrive daily and 2,000 are sent to working parties in the region. At the maximum, about 33,000 can be held in this camp, which has only one kitchen which, although big, seems inadequate for the number of prisoners. Some prisoners are fed from noon to 4 p.m. and others from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. There are only two meals a day - morning (coffee, sausage and honey) and evening (meat, haricot beans and potatoes). Prisoners have an hour's physical exercise each morning. The infirmary has 28 doctors. Many priests and clergymen minister to the prisoners' spiritual needs.

There are practically no books in the camp. The Commandant has been good enough to lend some of his own journals, as well as books, to the doctors. Men who work (about 1000) get 40 pfennig a day (about 4d.). Those in the working parties get 48 pfennig (about 5d.), of which nine are kept back for clothing and one for the prisoners who are not working. In this way, prisoners who are unoccupied get four pfennig (nearly 2d.) a day. N.C.O's at the working parties get half their pay, the remainder being retained by the camp authorities, who will send it later to their families.

The mail service seems to be quite normal. Three hundred parcels (presumably prisoner-of-war parcels) arrive at the camp each day. The camp did not appear to the delegates to be as well adapted to the needs of the prisoners as those previously visited. Questions of hygiene and food seem to stand out rather acutely. But on the whole, the prisoners consider they are treated very courteously.

STALAG 1 A – This camp contains 30,000 prisoners chiefly Frenchmen and Poles. Negroes who complained of being cold at night have been given a second blanket by the commandant, at the delegates' request. The kitchens, large and clean, made an excellent impression. Food seemed sufficient and prisoners seemed only to want a little more bread. Two cellars kept large quantities of butter and meat fresh. A large sports-ground has been set up and the prisoners have several footballs. Among the prisoners are a Belgian violin virtuoso and a radio tenor from Paris. The delegates also saw a well-known sculptor from Brussels. This can be considered a model camp. The prisoners are well treated and complain of nothing except of the few letters they receive.

AN EXTRACT IN "THE TIMES" LONDON

"International Red Cross delegates who have several time visited the Sulmona camp, near Rome, where prisoners of war include some from Victoria, report that conditions are good there and they are convinced that the authorities do their utmost to improve the lot of the prisoners.

THE RED CROSS AND ST JOHN WAR ORGANISATION OF ENGLAND  
REPORTS:-

"The principal camp for prisoners of war in Italy is at Sulmona, due east of Rome. The Commandant is Colonel MAZZUCCHETTI, who was himself a prisoner during the last war and who is said to show a very human appreciation of the needs of the prisoners.

Air Marshal Boyd who was captured when his aeroplane made a forced landing in Sicily soon after the entry of Italy into the war is housed in a spacious and elegant villa a few miles from the main camp.

The most serious complaint by prisoners at Sulmona is that they lack news and reading matter.

Efforts are being made through Geneva to expedite mail and the Red Cross is sending books".

Issued by -

Victorian Division, of the  
Australian Red Cross Society,  
Red Cross House,  
289 Swanstoh Street,  
Melborne.